

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: THE LABOR PARTY PREPARES FOR ITS CONVENTION

REF: 75 TEL AVIV 1131

SUMMARY: RESOLUTION OF DISPUTE OVER DELEGATE SELECTION HAS OPENED WAY TO LONG-DELAYED INTERNAL ELECTIONS IN JUNE AND THIRD LABOR PARTY CONVENTION THIS SUMMER. LABOR PARTY IS SEEKING TO RENEW ITSELF FROM WITHIN IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN ITS DOMINANT POSITION IN ISRAELI POLITICAL LIFE. TRADITIONAL FACTIONAL DIVISIONS ARE GIVING WAY TO NEW REGIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATIONS. CONVENTION WILL PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR RABIN TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS LEADER OF PARTY AS WELL AS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, AND IN EFFECT OBTAIN ENDORSEMENT AS ITS CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER IN NEXT ELECTION. ITS DELIBERATIONS ON FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY WILL DETERMINE THE PARTY PLATFORM, AND PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK FOR ISRAEL'S NEGOTIATING STANCE IN 1977. END SUMMARY.

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1. CONVENTION PREPARATIONS. END OF YEAR-LONG IMPASSE

REGARDING MANNER IN WHICH DELEGATES TO LABOR PARTY CONVENTION WILL BE CHOSEN HAS OPENED WAY TO INTERNAL ELECTIONS IN JUNE AND ITS CONVOCAION THIS SUMMER. THIS WILL BE THIRD CONVENTION SINCE FOUNDING OF LABOR PARTY IN JANUARY 1968 BY FUSION OF MAPAI, AHDUT AVODAH AND RAFI. CONVENTION WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN HELD LAST YEAR BUT PREPARATIONS WERE SIDETRACKED BY COMBINATION OF RABIN'S APPARENT DISINTEREST IN CONVENING IT ON SCHEDULE AND CONTROVERSY OVER ELECTION PROCEDURES. CONVENTION WILL BE MAJOR STEP IN LABOR PARTY EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN ITS DOMINANT POSITION BY REVITALIZING ITS PROCEDURES AND INSTITUTIONS.

2. SELECTION OF DELEGATES. CENTRAL COMMITTEE (CC) JANUARY 18 DECIDED THAT 3,000 CONVENTION DELEGATES WOULD BE SELECTED AS FOLLOWS: A) 2,400 DELEGATES IN SECRET BALLOT DISTRICT ELECTIONS THIS JUNE. CANDIDATES WILL RUN ON PERSONAL BASIS RATHER THAN ON LIST OR FACTIONAL SLATE BUT EACH VOTER WILL BE ALLOWED TO VOTE FOR NO MORE THAN 50 PER CENT OF TOTAL DELEGATES FROM HIS DISTRICT. LATTER PROVISIO IS INTENDED TO PRESERVE TRADITIONAL INTRAPARTY BALATCQ WITHOUT RECOURSE TO EXPLICIT FACTIONAL COMPETITION. B) 600 MEMBERS OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE ARE INVITED TO CONVENTION WHICH WILL DECIDE WHETHER THEY HAVE VOTING RIGHTS. MANY CC MEMBERS WILL RUN IN DISTRICT ELECTIONS RATHER THAN AWAIT DECISION OF CONVENTION, ALTHOUGH REMAINDER MAY BE GRANTED VOTING RIGHTS AT CONVENTION ITSELF.

3. THESE ARRANGEMENTS REPRESENT RESOLUTION OF LENGTHY CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THOSE WHO WANTED TO FORCE THROUGH A CLEAN SWEEP OF ENTRENCHED (AND AGING) PARTY FUNCTIONAIES BY COMPELLING VIRTUALLY ALL CC MEMBERS--MINUS TEN-FIFTEEN PER CENT--TO COMPETE IN INTERNAL ELECTIONS AND THOSE WHO WANTED TO "EARMARK" THEIR VOTING RIGHTS AT THE CONVENTION. JANUARY 18 DECISION SIDESTEPED THE ISSUE AND, ALTHOUGH EXPOSING PARTY TO FRESH CRITICISM FOR FAILING TO MAKE VIGOROUS ENOUGH BREAK FROM PAST, NONETHELESS CLEARS WAY FOR CONVENTION WHERE NATURE OF DELIBERATIONS WILL BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN QUESTION CONFIDENTIAL

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OF WHO ONE-UPPED WHOM IN THIS RATHER STERILE ARGUMENT.

4. DECLINE OF THE FACTIONS. THE FACTIONS (MAPAI, AHDUT AVODAH AND RAFI) HAVE BEEN ON WANE FOR SEVERAL YEARS, BUT THEIR DECLINE HAS BECOME MORE PRONOUNCED WITH POSTWAR TRANSITION FROM OLD GUARD (MEIR, SAPIR, EBAN AND DAYAN) TO NEW LEADERSHIP CADRE (RABIN, ALLON AND

PERES). MAINSTREAM MAPAI, WHICH USED TO CONTROL CENTRAL POSITIONS IN GOVERNMENT AND PARTY, HAS BEEN FORCED TO GIVE WAY TO YOUNGER LEADERSHIP UNIDENTIFIED WITH IT, MOST NOTABLY RABIN HIMSELF. WHILE MAPAI STILL HAS NUMERICAL PREDOMINANCE IN CABINET IT DOES NOT CONTROL KEY PORTFOLIOS. OTHER FACTIONS HAVE ALSO FARED POORLY. RAFI KNESSET FACTION SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE OVER SINAI II AND AHDUT AVODAH IS ALSO BADLY DIVIDED ON IDEOLOGICAL/POLITICAL ISSUES. INTERNAL ELECTIONS WILL NOW STRENGTHEN MEMBERS' REGIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL IDENTIFICATION (KIBBUTZIM, INTERMEDIATE GENERATION, ETC) AT EXPENSE OF FACTIONS. ALTHOUGH FACTIONAL ALIGNMENTS MAY STILL DETERMINE DISTRIBUTION OF CABINET PORTFOLIOS, THE TREND SEEMS TO BE TOWARD THEIR SLOW BUT RATHER CERTAIN DEMISE. CENTRAL COMMITTEE ACTION ON ELECTION PROCEDURES IN FACT HAS GIVEN SEAL OF APPROVAL TO DECISION AGAINST FACTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN LAST YEAR BY THE PARTY'S MAJOR BRANCHES IN TEL AVIV, JERUSALEM AND HAIFA.

5. CONVENTION'S SIGNIFICANCE. THE CONVENTION WILL SEEK TO UNITE THE PARTY BEHIND ITS CURRENT LEADERSHIP AND DETERMINE THE PLATFORM ON WHICH IT WILL RUN. FOR RABIN IT WILL PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION AS PARTY LEADER AND TO BE DESIGNATED ITS CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER IN HIS OWN RIGHT. (RABIN WAS NUMBER 20 ON LABOR ALIGNMENT LIST IN 1973 ELECTION, AND WAS CATAPULTED TO LEADERSHIP POSITION IN SPECIAL APRIL 1974 CENTRAL COMMITTEE ELECTION AFTER MEIR RESIGNED.) RABIN'S STANDING WILL BE MEASURED BY HIS ABILITY TO MARSHAL DELEGATES' SUPPORT FOR HIS PROGRAMMATIC RESOLUTIONS ON FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY. THE CONVENTION WILL PROVIDE THE FORUM FOR THE LABOR PARTY'S 1976 FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE, AND IS LIKELY TO BE CONFIDENTIAL

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INVOLVE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ITS CENTER/RIGHT AND MORE MODERATE ELEMENTS ON THEIR RESPECTIVE APPROACHES

TO ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATING ISSUES.

6. THERE IS BROAD CONSENSUS AMONG LOCAL COMMENTATORS THAT LABOR PARTY HAS BEEN AT LOW EBB SINCE POSTWAR SHAKEUP TOPPLED THE OLD GUARD. ITS INSTITUTIONS (CENTRAL COMMITTEE, SECRETARIAT, ETC.) HAVE BECOME MORIBUND, ITS SECRETARY-GENERAL (MEIR ZARMI) HAS FAILED TO PROVIDE STRONG LEADERSHIP, AND RABIN HAS DEVOTED HIS ENERGIES SO FAR MORE TO MATTERS OF STATE THAN PARTY. BEYOND QUESTION OF WHETHER PARTY CAN REVITALIZE ITSELF FROM WITHIN IS LARGER QUESTION OF WHETHER IT CAN RETAIN ITS CENTRAL POSITION IN ISRAELI POLITICS.

WITH ISRAEL FACING TOUGH FOREIGN POLICY AND DOMESTIC
DILEMMAS, THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IS AWARE THAT OUTCOME
OF NEXT ELECTION IS FAR FROM A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.
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